



# The Commissioner's Blog

Thoughts from  
Kentucky's Commissioner of Education  
Kevin C. Brown, Interim Commissioner



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*When you see the familiar big yellow school buses on the road, what comes to mind? Field trips? Safety? Childhood memories of riding a bus to and from school? As Kentucky Associate Commissioner for the Office of District and Support Services, Hiren Desai, explains in this week's guest blog, school district leaders see a dilemma.*

*Kevin C. Brown  
Interim Commissioner*

## **The urgent need for action on SEEK transportation funding**

In my role as the Associate Commissioner for Administration and Support for the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), I am fortunate to have the opportunity to engage superintendents in conversations about school district funding on a regular basis. Over the last two years, many superintendents have shared their frustration with me about the increasing costs of local pupil transportation, which are significantly hampering local efforts for school improvement.

By way of context, readers should be aware that the state provides funding to school districts through the Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) funding formula, which has been in place since 1990 and includes multiple components. One of the least discussed and most frequently overlooked components is SEEK transportation funding, which provides districts with reimbursement for the costs of transporting all K-12 students living more than one mile from school. School districts utilize this funding to pay for a variety of pupil transportation-related costs, including personnel, school bus maintenance, and fuel expenditures.

The transportation funding component of SEEK originally provided all school districts with 100 percent reimbursement of eligible pupil transportation costs, based upon average daily attendance. Unfortunately, over time, the state share of this funding has remained flat, while local district costs for pupil transportation have grown, due to a variety of factors, including enrollment, higher fuel costs, and increased maintenance. The state provides approximately \$214 million a year in reimbursement for local school districts; however, based on the formula driven calculation, districts require \$362 million to ensure that students are transported safely. That equates to approximately 59 percent in state reimbursement for eligible local district pupil transportation expenses. As a side note, districts also spend local transportation dollars on transportation expenses for activities like field trips and non-pupil transportation expenses, but that is not part of the SEEK transportation calculation for state reimbursement.

In essence, local school districts are in the unfortunate situation of having to use more and more local funds each year, to pay for pupil transportation costs, which are in theory a state obligation. This places a significant financial burden on local school districts, and also diverts funding from other critical areas, such as classroom instruction.

Every superintendent I have spoken with agrees on two things: the safety and wellbeing of our students is paramount; and the current funding situation is untenable. Urgent action is needed in order to help our school districts and ensure the safe transportation of all students is an adequately funded priority. There is an added financial benefit to taking action now. If adequate funding were provided at the state level to cover local district pupil transportation costs, this would also free up an equivalent amount (in local funds currently obligated for this purpose), for local use for other critical areas of local priority, such as classroom instruction. Kentucky's students would reap the benefits!